



“The World in a Small Rectangle”: Spatialities in Monika Fagerholm’s Novels

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A suburban terraced house. Two teenagers in a bedroom, listening to the adults in the living room on the other side of the wall. It is an image so familiar it borders on the pedestrian, and yet it is a utopia:

Men välkommen till åren noll i alla fall, här kan allting hända. För i Leos rum, det riktiga Utopins rum, som snarare är en fysisk plats än någonting i huvudet. Där finns, fortfarande och alltid, två ungar som är eviga. Det är Leo och jag, och vi är eviga. (Fagerholm 1998, 39)¹

But welcome to the years zero in any case, anything can happen here. Because in Leo’s room, the real Utopia room, which is a physical place rather than something in one’s head. There is, still and forever, two kids who are eternal. It is Leo and I, and we are eternal.

This is *Diva*, the narrator and protagonist in Finland-Swedish author Monika Fagerholm’s novel *Diva. En uppväxsts egna alfabet med docklaboratorium (en bonusberättelse ur framtiden)* (1998; “Diva. The Alphabet of an Adolescence with a Doll Laboratory (A Bonus Tale from the Future)”).

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She makes Utopia an actual, real place in the world as opposed to something dreamed, imagined or false, and then immediately goes on to create something broader by claiming that she and her boyfriend Leo are in this Utopia forever and that they are eternal. A similar move takes place in *The American Girl* (2009), where a swimming pool becomes “the world in a small rectangle”: A place expands beyond the physical boundaries of the room in a move which is, as I shall show below, typical of Monika Fagerholm (Fagerholm 2009, 261, 266, 269, 274).

As a novelist, Fagerholm has been successful in Finland and Sweden as well as internationally, and her influence can be seen in a new generation of Finland-Swedish and Swedish authors.² She made her debut in 1987 with *Sham*, a collection of short stories, and her first novel *Wonderful Women by the Water* was published in 1994 (*Underbara kvinnor vid vatten*, trans. 1997/1998). Since then she has published four critically acclaimed novels, which have been translated into several languages, and she has won prestigious literary awards in both Finland and Sweden. One of Fagerholm’s central themes is girls and girlhood: she frequently lets a girl be the one who sees and defines the world, and thus Fagerholm grapples with questions concerning gender, language and agency. She is also a writer of spatiality. She layers real geographical places and their fictional counterparts, or places that vaguely resemble them. Places that may already exist in literature through other authors are given new layers of meaning, and thus our images of them are strengthened and expanded. Just as often Fagerholm dislodges the connection between the fictional place and its referent by creating her own, modified version of a place. These layers are a spatial metaphor in themselves and move the discussion toward ideas concerning mental spatiality. Philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre uses the term *mental space* to denote “the space of philosophers and epistemologists,” in other words the result of a theoretical practice concerning knowledge, as opposed to physical and social space (Lefebvre 1991, 6). Here I am simply referring to a spatiality which is expanded from the “real” world, whether that world is real within the novel, outside it or both. Fagerholm’s characters frequently go further than merely being in or inhabiting a place, they take possession of a place and use it for their own purposes. While this is not a theoretical practice as such, it is a form of knowledge creation through narrative, and it creates new spatialities which often extend beyond the place itself. It is this conflation of space and place I will discuss through key works and the kinds of places, spaces and spatialities they exhibit. This means reading spatiality on multiple levels, from place as a geographical point to space as a mental construct.

INDISTINCT DISTINCTIONS

Space and place are notoriously nebulous concepts and, as literary scholar Eric Prieto writes about place, “something I seem to understand well enough, provided that nobody asks me to define it” (Prieto 2012, 12).³ However, the discussion above hints at the kind of concepts at work in this chapter. Simply put, place is a geographical site that someone has developed a relationship to, which means it can be a locality as well as, say, a building or your favorite spot in the forest. It can usually be located on a map, albeit perhaps not a map of the world outside the novel. Space in turn is more abstract and does not lend itself to geographical maps quite as naturally. While place too can be abstract (e.g. having a place on a course, finding one’s place in life), I will be using space to refer to a more conceptual spatiality in addition to space as something general and undifferentiated in line with geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, to whom I will return below (Tuan 2001, 6).

Space is frequently seen as a more abstract economic or scientific quantity, while place is connected to personal experiences, values and affiliation. A geographical site becomes a place when it is meaningful to someone—it is an experience which creates signification.⁴ This is not only an individual experience, however, but also happens when we participate in the experiences of others, like reading descriptions and experiences of a place, whether the context is factual or fictional. In other words, place can be seen as a way to organize space both individually and collectively, to distinguish a geographical site from everything around it.

Therefore, Prieto notes, poststructuralist scholarship has been more focused on space. Space offers a way to examine power structures, discursive networks and social institutions like language, ideology and political economy rather than the subjective experience of a geographical site (Prieto 2012, 75ff.). As I will discuss further, and as has been pointed out by literary scholars Bertrand Westphal and Jan Hellgren, among others, the line between space and place is unstable at best, and a hard and fast separation of the two is not necessarily productive. Hellgren, for example, notes that “a place always has spatial dimensions and a defined portion of space is always characterized by a specific perspective which marks, defines, and measures” (“en plats alltid har rumsliga dimensioner och ett avgränsat stycke rum alltid är präglad av ett specifikt perspektiv som markerar, definierar och mäter upp”) (Hellgren 2014, 26).⁵

For the purposes of this chapter, I will use Tuan’s discussion on how space and place relate to each other as a starting point:

The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan 2001, 6)

For Tuan, space and place are very much connected, both on the experience level and on the defining level. What he calls “undifferentiated space” becomes place when someone assigns value to it (Tuan 2001, 6). This also means that space is something uncharted, unfamiliar and even potentially threatening. Tuan’s starting point is consciousness: the gaze is directed *from* a place or space rather than *at* either. There is a direction from place which is then expanded in space (and vice versa), rather than two separate but related phenomena.

Tuan frequently works with a geographical concept of space—space may not have paths and signposts but it can still be placed on a map—but he also discusses mythical space and worlds of fantasy, be it spatial aspects of a world view or religion or an unknown area far away (Tuan 2001, 85ff.). While Tuan’s analysis of different cultures and their cosmologies certainly differs from the idea of mental spatiality I am outlining in this chapter, he makes a useful observation regarding the possibilities of an extended, abstract space: “[m]ythical space is also a response of feeling and imagination to fundamental human needs. It differs from pragmatic and scientifically conceived spaces in that it ignores the logic of exclusion and contradiction” (Tuan 2001, 99). In a Fagerholmian context this means that awareness of openness, freedom and threat develops, as we have seen, into an expansion of the concrete place into a spatiality that combines characteristics of both space and place, and frequently defies the constraints of physical and geographical spaces and places. Instead, this spatiality allows an emotional or intellectual exploration of central themes like gender and subjectivity or, in a larger context, social positions and discourses.

TIME AND TIMELESSNESS AS AN EFFECT OF PLACE

Wonderful Women by the Water (1997) is often seen as Fagerholm’s breakthrough novel.⁶ It is, on the one hand, a description of children observing and negotiating family tensions and, on the other hand, a story about their mothers and their attempts to be glamorous and modern women in the

1960s. The general tone of the novel reflects this ambition and is thus deliberately breezy, with considerable focus on appearances, objects and celebrity culture.

During the winters, Thomas and his parents Bella and Kayus "live in a third-floor city apartment above a square courtyard./In summer they live in a summer paradise" ("På vintrarna bor de i en stadslägenhet på tredje våningen ovanför en gårdskvadrat./På somrarna bor de i ett sommarparadis") (Fagerholm 1997, 7). This summer paradise is also where the majority of the novel takes place, and where Bella and Rosa meet and become close friends. Save for the beach, the summer paradise is described in terms of buildings (the red cottage, the white villa), but not much more: the interior seems more important and is given slightly more detail even though it too is kept fairly general. The summer paradise is not an identifiable place, and yet it is archetypically familiar in Finland: the summer cottage or house is a place which has always looked the same, where you do things the way they have always been done. In practice, it is a place where you store furniture and household items you do not have the heart to throw away but do not want to keep at home. This frequently creates a sense of living outside of time, or of time having stopped: several childhood homes worth of paraphernalia have accumulated and project different decades into the same space.⁷

As a contrast to this timelessness and fixity we have the wonderful women by the water, who are busy performing a specific femininity, which is very much anchored in time and points to 1960s luxe magazine covers and glamorous film stars. Their communication is superficial and seemingly cheerful:

Men Bella och Rosa då, strandkvinnorna, vad gör de, var finns de? Jo. De är nog där. På stranden, ibland i Rosas vardagsrum på eftermiddagarna också, men mest i vita villan, på verandan, i stora rummet, några timmar någongång på dagarna. Rosa dricker kaffe och pratar. Hon pratar om ett nytt koncept som hon och Tupsu Lindbergh ska vara de första att lansera i det här landet. Deras dröm Tupperware för det moderna perfekta hushållet. För det perfekta moderna hushållet, skrattar Rosa Ängel, men inte ett sådant där skratt som i sig liksom innesluter sin absoluta motsats, skrattet i stunden just innan man slänger sin bystdel i trädgårdsbersån annars bara och inte för att visa sina nakna bröst för någon, skrattet innan man drar stöpseln till en luftkonditioneringsapparat ur väggen och säger att man ju pratar strunt och börjar prata om andra saker, någonting helt annat än Elizabeth Taylors kärleksliv som alla är övertygade om att man håller på och pratar om.

Men ett vanligt skratt. Ett lätt skratt. Ett skratt så att man faktiskt tror eller måste tro att Rosa Ängel menar exakt det hon säger. (Fagerholm 1994, 111)

But Bella and Rosa then, the shore women, what are they doing, where are they? Yes, they are there all right. On the shore, sometimes in Rosa's living room in the afternoons as well, but mostly on the veranda of the white villa, in the big room, for a few hours sometime during the day. Rosa drinks coffee and talks. She is talking about a new idea she and [wealthy neighbor] Tupsu Lindbergh are to be the first to launch in this country. Their dream Tupperware for the perfect modern household. For the perfect modern household, says Rosa Ängel with a laugh, but not the kind of laugh that seems to contain the absolute opposite, the laugh of the moment just before you chuck your suntop into the harbour, but not to show your bare breasts to anyone, a laugh before you yank the air-conditioning plug out of the socket and say you are talking nonsense and start talking about something else, something quite different from Elizabeth Taylor's love life everyone's convinced you are talking about.

But an ordinary laugh. A light laugh. A laugh so that you actually believe or have to believe that Rosa Ängel means exactly what she says. (Fagerholm 1997, 96–7)

Bella and Rosa want something else, something new and different. This is a life project, meaning that it goes deeper than a general interest in the trends of the day. However, these are not politically aware, well-read women; they do not have a language for their emancipation. Instead, they speak in images and objects and consumption: "Where the explanations of psychological prose should be, there are lines which have been restyled as slogans or clichés, plastic Mickey Mouse measuring cups, cine-film sequences in absurd repetition," as literary critic Pia Ingström (2000, 325, trans. HL) puts it. Much of Bella's and Rosa's speech is similarly stylized, like the idea of the perfect modern household—which characteristically is instantly destabilized by the rest of the quote. Through the different nuances of laughter, the narrator shows how Bella's and Rosa's intellectual pursuits are seen as limited and probably not intellectual at all. The laughter is performative, it is adapted not to different situations but to how they want to *appear* in different situations. This is emphasized by the laugh in the second paragraph, which both reveals that Bella sometimes speaks between the lines and covers up these cracks.

The 1960s serve as a backdrop to Bella's and Rosa's emancipatory efforts, but it is not necessary to read the narrative as an accurate and

uncritical reproduction of the decade. While the chapter titles explicitly place the narrative in time ("Gabby's White Angel," 1963 (Gabbes vita ängel, 1963), "Out into the World," 1965 (Ut i världen, 1965)), Fagerholm also uses cultural markers and objects to situate the novel in time. Fredric Jameson calls this pastness, which means to evoke a feeling of nostalgia through stylistic references to historical periods rather than an attempt at rendering "real" and "authentic" history. In this Jameson includes adaptations from one medium to another, for example a screen version of a novel where the viewer's knowledge of the original is part of the pastness of the new version (Jameson 1991, 19–20; Jameson 2015, 106). Rosa's and Bella's performative aesthetic with its nods to Hollywood glamor functions as an intermedial adaptation and an additional evocation of pastness. In other words, the novel does not gain depth through a representation of "real" history.

Pia Ingström notes that the novel emphasizes superficiality both thematically and linguistically and asks if there is an authentic statement behind the clichés in *Wonderful Women by the Water* (Ingström 2014a). The novel itself asks questions in the same vein:

Men Rosa då, vad tänker hon på, när hon går med raska steg över gården bort och upp till huset på berget för att byta om till boating-kläder och måla läpparna i en rosa nyans och knyta ett vitt band kring håret för att det inte ska blåsa i hennes ansikte ute på det öppna havet? Är det som det ser ut? Tänker hon på Tupperware som hon och Tupsu ska bli de första att lansera i det här landet, för det moderna perfekta hushållet, som hon nyss förklarat för Bella i vita villan? Tänker hon på det moderna perfekta hushållet? På Tupsu Lindberghs djupa vänskap som betyder så mycket för henne som hon också nyss förklarat? Gabbes flygvärdinnor till exempel som börjar komma in i bilden de här åren och för Rosa mest fungerar som en påminnelse om att hon är mark- och inte flyg- och att det faktiskt är en stor skillnad? På hur hon ska förhålla sig? Vilket av de få förhållningssätt som är accepterade varav inget intresserar henne hon ska välja; martyrisk duktighet eller sårad stolthet? (Fagerholm 1994, 113)

But Rosa, then, what is she thinking about as she walks rapidly across the yard and away up to the house on the hill to change into boating clothes, paint her lips a pink shade and tie a white ribbon round her hair so that it will not blow in her face out on the open sea? Are things as they look? Is she thinking about Tupperware she and Tupsu are to be the first to launch in this country, for the perfect modern household, as she has just explained to Bella in the white villa? Is she thinking about the perfect modern household?

About Tupsu Lindbergh's great friendship that means so much to her, which she has also just explained? About all the other things you might think she might be thinking about? Gabby's air hostesses, for instance, who start coming into the picture over these years, to Rosa mostly functioning as a reminder that she is a ground- not an air-hostess and *that actually there is a great difference*? About what attitude she is to take? Which of the few acceptable attitudes, none of which interest her is she to choose? Martyred bravery or hurt pride? (Fagerholm 1997, 98–9)

The subjects of the narrator's questions—what might constitute a perfect household, whether or not Rosa's husband is faithful, how Rosa compares to the women her husband is seeing—do indeed point to depth beneath the surface. But what is being asked is what kind of attention Rosa gives these subjects, whether she has the ability and willingness to reflect. Rosa herself provides a partial answer. First of all, she will not launch Tupperware: "She would rather die." Moreover, "she needs the idea as a façade for things she does not—well, ye gods, how can that be described?" ("hellre dör hon," "hon behöver idén som en fasad för något i sig själv, en fasad för saker hon inte—ja, gudar hur ska man beskriva det?") (Fagerholm 1997, 99). Rosa is literally unable to put her yearning into words but does make the performative aspects explicit. She cannot reach beyond the façade, which illustrates both her lack of language to express herself and the question of what, if anything, lies below the surface. However, the questions highlight the assumption that Ingström too is making: there is something to be found, what we see is indeed a mere surface. If we instead read the characters' experimentation with repetition and performance as attempts to make the clichés themselves into authentic statements, the focus will instead be on the postmodern attributes of the novel.⁸

While the question of surface and depth is spatial in itself, the aim here has been to contrast Rosa's and Bella's image of a new time with the temporal fixity of the summer cottage. Their emancipatory efforts are indicated through temporal as well as spatial markers and movement, like the perfect modern household, air hostesses as opposed to ground hostesses and successful and, in particular, unsuccessful water skiing. As a contrast, the timelessness of the summer paradise, a generic place which is expanded into a string of identical perfect summers, anchor and counterbalance their endeavor to live a more glamorous time.

SPATIALITY AND NARRATIVE POTENTIAL

Diva, the narrator in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, is the 13-year-old protagonist of Fagerholm's eponymous novel (1998). She is, in general, concerned with the real and true, as opposed to what she sees in literary tradition and narrative. Leo's and her Utopia room is contrasted with the Utopia house, the living room on the other side of the wall, where "Leo's mum and dad and the friends and acquaintances of Leo's mum and dad talked over each other, quoted right and quoted wrong and corrected each other and called this **we build the utopias** and believed it themselves" ("Leos mamma och pappa och Leos mammas och pappas vänner och bekanta babblade i munnen på varandra, citerade rätt och citerade fel och rättade varandra och kallade detta här **vi bygger utopierna**, och trodde på det själva") (Fagerholm 1998, 38). Here Diva builds a contrast between a perceived cliché or self-consciously bourgeois make-believe and the kind of spatiality so typical of Fagerholm, where the starting point is a concrete place which characters expand into an abstract, mental spatiality.

Diva says that she lives with her mother and her brothers "in an apartment on the third floor in Värtbyhamn and its surroundings which is a suburb in the east" ("i en lägenhet på tredje våningen i Värtbyhamn med omnejd som är en förort österut") (Fagerholm 1998, 34). This suburb can be placed on a map, partly because there is an identifiable street address and partly because it is recognizable: Pia Ingström writes that the Helsinki native recognizes Botby gård (Puotila), but that anyone can see, as the novel puts it, the desert plains around the supermarket (Fagerholm 1998, 321, 323; Ingström 2014a).⁹ All of this is to say that it is possible, sometimes with a bit of effort, to identify and locate quite a few of the geographical places in Monika Fagerholm's works. I shall return to the function of identifiable geographical places below and just note here that identifying Botby gård emphasizes the importance of the suburb itself in *Diva*. At the time of the novel's present, the 1970s, the suburb is relatively recent: the oldest apartment buildings are from the early 1960s. Thirteen-year-old Diva is both a regular teenager and a feminist experiment: her first person narrative is a postmodern medley of intertextuality, metafictionality and transgressions of various norms, both literary and otherwise.¹⁰ She is a new kind of girl in a new kind of landscape, and the suburb becomes an empty stage or canvas for her to fill.¹¹

Diva creates and recreates places by giving them her own names: the Utopia room, the Island of Happiness, the laboratory of dolls, the Hobohobo kiosk (named after a fictional sweet). If something is important enough to be given a new name, it is part of her creating—narrating—herself as a new kind of subject. She does this by building a specific mental environment and even giving herself a new name. The geographical site itself is more or less of an age with Diva, so recent that the narrating Diva can construct her own version and fill it with significance. It becomes an inquiry into discourse, gender and language. In a move typical of the novel, Diva gives the reader an interpretation of what she is doing:

Men i Östra läroverket, jag går genom rummen, före skoldagen, under skoldagen och när skoldagen är slut. Jag har **min allnyckel**; med allnyckeln tar jag min in på olika ställen i Östra läroverkets inre delar. Går långt ut i Östra läroverkets **inre arkitektur**, och det som händer där, det är mitt eget, det är privat.

Vad är det jag håller på med?

Jag inlöser med mitt eget liv vad jag tror på. (Fagerholm 1998, 41)

But in Östra läroverket [Diva's school], I walk through the rooms, before the school day, during the school day and when the school day is over. I have my **master key**; with the master key I enter different places in the inner parts of Östra läroverket. I walk far into the **inner architecture** of Östra läroverket, and what happens there, it is my own, it is private.

What is it that I am doing?

With my own life I redeem what I believe in.

Diva uses the school building to create different versions of herself and her stories, and other characters in Diva's narrative use the school for similar purposes. Prosaic and out of the way places like the audiovisual library, the map room and the theater storage closet start as repositories and dumps but develop into sites of narrative potential, that is sites where stories expand a place beyond its natural limits. All of these rooms hold larger worlds even before characters take possession of them: the audiovisual library is storage for knowledge, the map room literally contains the world and the theater storage closet contains more or less fanciful detritus for creating different lives.¹² Yet they are put to decidedly different use and the traditional stories the rooms contain are warped.¹³

If Diva and other characters create mental spatialities through renaming and repurposing, Fagerholm's next novel, *The American Girl* (2004/2009),

is a clear example of how mental spatiality is contingent on narratives. Again the novel, a murder mystery and coming of age story, is set in an identifiable geographical place which has been renamed in the novel, and again the real-world geography is less relevant for the moment. Instead I will focus on a scene in which a swimming pool becomes an entire universe.

In the beginning of the novel we see a little girl, Sandra Wörn, running back and forth in an empty swimming pool, swinging her arms like a swimmer and pretending to use the pool like it was meant to be used. This is a solitary scene, tinged with sadness, and seen through the eyes of a boy looking through the window (Fagerholm 2009, 43). The swimming pool comes to life only when Sandra makes it her own place by hauling some of her things there and playing in it. When the audacious Doris Flinkenberg turns up—she breaks in and Sandra finds her in the swimming pool—and empties her backpack full of treasures, the girls' things are mixed up into new, unexpected combinations:

Och det var Doris med kappsäck och Sandra med kappsäck: två kappsäcks-flickor som tömde ut innehållen i sina väskor på simbassängsbottnens gröna kakel så att allt blandades ihop. Så att det uppstod intressanta nya sammanhang och nya, oväntade kombinationer. Det ena med det andra, idéer, hugskott, smått och stort.

(...)

Den ena kappsäcken och den andra kappsäcken och allt som fanns däri; av detta uppstod lekar och berättelser, berättelser och lekar, lekar som var berättelser, som skulle sysselsätta Doris och Sandra i många, många år. Och föras upp, småningom i en annan verklighet.

Och vidare, nästan upp i vuxenhet. (Fagerholm 2004, 107–8)

And it was Doris with a backpack and Sandra with a backpack: two backpackgirls who emptied out the contents of their bags on the green-tiled bottom of the swimming pool so that everything mixed together. So that new connections arose and new, unexpected combinations. The one with the other, ideas, whims, big and small.

(...)

The one backpack and the other backpack and everything inside them, games and stories, stories and games, games that were stories, would occupy Doris and Sandra for many, many years. And would be elevated, little by little, into another reality.

And beyond, almost into adulthood. (Fagerholm 2009, 106–7)

The girls build worlds, they tell each other stories, play complicated games and recreate, among other things, the mystery of the American girl.¹⁴ The mixed treasures form an intertextual universe, made up of a variety of popular culture phenomena: actors Jayne Mansfield and Lupe Vélez, Swedish easy-listening pop (“*Lasting Love Songs for Moonstruck Lovers* (Doris’s intolerable music)”) (“‘slitstarka bugg för kärlekskranka’ (Doris olidliga favoritmusik)”), magazines about dreadful crimes and accidents, Nancy Drew novels (Fagerholm 2009, 106–7). The world grows in the swimming pool as a result of stories, intertextual as well as the ones Sandra and Doris make up, but at the same time it shrinks as they disregard and even reject the rest of the world. This is underscored as the greenery outside the window grows and thickens until the visibility is next to zero. The swimming pool becomes “a world in a small rectangle” (“världen i en fyrkant minimal”), and Sandra and Doris exclude everything else in favor of focusing on each other, first through childhood play and later through love and sexuality (Fagerholm 2009, 261–76). The pool changes from something half-finished to something more than a concrete square in the basement floor and finally to a world full of potential. It is endless, but also very much anchored in the girls’ personal and emotional space.

Eventually Doris’s and Sandra’s relationship changes, and Doris’s suicide brings it to an abrupt end. In the midst of all this the pool is filled with water, but it is used mostly as a bin: no-one swims in it, and the surface is littered with cigarette ends and paper scraps. Thus, when the pool is as it is “supposed” to be, i.e. full of water, it is a dead container of revolution rather than “the world in a small rectangle” and a site of endless narrative potential. Later Sandra’s stepmother attempts to lay out a tropical garden in the pool, but it too fails—the plants cannot thrive in the damp and the dimness, and everything dies. The potential dies with Doris, and Sandra’s and her symbiotic language universe cannot exist anymore. The pool has become a place again, and the more or less endless abstract room that Sandra and Doris created is gone.

THE REAL AND THE IMAGINARY PLACE

The text no longer comes before the virgin land and uncharted seas: the text comes before a text, which in turn comes before another text, and so on in an endless chain in which the layers of paper pile upon one another with the beautiful regularity of geological and archaeological data. (Westphal 2011, 155)

As we have seen, geography is present in Fagerholm's novels even though it tends to be obfuscated and even though the places are relatively unknown even by Finnish standards. So why would it be interesting or relevant to identify the referents, what would this knowledge add to an analysis? Bertrand Westphal sees three types of connections between text and referent: text which influences the view of space, places which become text through overdetermination, and a complete conflation of text and place. He also discusses places through the texts that precede them: many travelers to Paris, for example, have a connection to the city through various artistic representations. This turns Paris into a mix of immediate sensory experience and "the intertextual construction that makes up their separate personal encyclopedias" (Westphal 2011, 152, 158).

Westphal's main subject is cities which have appeared in literature time and time again, but what are we to make of a place which, as in Fagerholm's works, is not already a text? Her versions of small and even obscure Finnish places certainly do not have the same effect as the nth version of Rome or Dublin. However, Fagerholm often uses places and spaces which are evocative, like a recently built suburb or the ubiquitous summer cottage, so generally described that they function as an icon—or a Soviet leasehold:

I begynnelsen var kriget, och kriget, det förlorades.

Segrande makt, det väldiga landet i öster, fick upp ögonen för vissa områden som man gärna ville ha för vidare militärbasverksamhet och övrigt; och landet fick behålla sin självständighet i alla fall.

Ett område gavs över till segrande makt, för en tid. På just det området fanns Trakten. Befolkningen evakuerades med raska tag, alla tvingades att flytta alltså, och sedan under de följande åren var området som stängt för yttrevärlden. (Fagerholm 2004, 17)

In the beginning was the war, and the war, it was lost.

Certain areas caught the eye of the victorious nation, the great land in the east, areas that were highly desirable for future military exploits and just in general, and the country could keep its independence regardless.

One area was handed over to the victorious nation, for a time. The District was located in just that area. Consequently, the people were evacuated and everyone was forced to move, and later during the years that followed it was as though the area was closed off from the outside world. (Fagerholm 2009, 11)

To a Finnish reader this quote from the beginning of *The American Girl* obviously refers to Porkkala (Porkkala), a peninsula and the surrounding areas which were leased to the Soviet Union 1944–1956. However, whether or not the reader is familiar with Finnish history the passage describes something dramatic and out of the ordinary, underscored by the fact that large parts of the fictional area changed ownership through a fateful game of poker. “[A]lmost all of the Second Cape and a significant portion of the woods and so on” (“nästan hela Andra Udden och en betydande del av skogen och så vidare”) are no longer owned by Baron von B., but by the considerably less distinguished cousin’s papa and the Dancer (Fagerholm 2004, 17, 2009, 11–2). Now, the fact that the District used to belong to “the victorious nation” and that people were forced to move is of little consequence to the present and the plot of *The American Girl* and its sequel, *The Glitter Scene*. Land ownership and lucrative land deals certainly do affect how the cousin’s papa, a generally disagreeable and passive man, is read, and the fact that he has secured ownership of previously inaccessible land even more so. In other words, the geographical particularities are interpretive aids rather than key plot components or spatial markers.

If the geographical referent was present but more or less concealed in *Diva*, *The American Girl* and *The Glitter Scene*, Fagerholm’s latest novel *Lola uppochner* (2012; “Lola upside down”) brings it closer to the surface. The novel takes place on two different temporal levels. In the present, Jana Marton reluctantly returns to her home town Flatnäs (“Flat Cape”) after receiving a puzzling invitation to an “autumn dinner party for the girls” (“höstmiddag för flickorna”), which turns out to provide answers for a series of events that took place some 25 years earlier (Fagerholm 2012, 12). Jana Marton is also the one who found the murdered Flemming Pettersson in 1994, the main temporal level of the novel.

Lola uppochner is labeled a thriller—it has a murder, investigating police officers and suspects—but Fagerholm is, as is her wont, not overly concerned with genre conventions.¹⁵ There is a wealth of characters who slide in and out of focus, and it is not easy to determine which of them, if any, is the protagonist. In her review of the novel, literary scholar and critic Mia Österlund notes that “[t]he real main character is the small town. If you choose that perspective, the novel’s glimpse-like and kaleidoscopic essence is easier to discern and finds its meaning” (“Den egentliga huvudpersonen är småstaden. Väljer man det perspektivet urskiljs romanens glimtvisa kalejdoskopiska väsen lättare och finner sin mening”) (Österlund 2012). The novel is set in Flatnäs, a town at least somewhat reminiscent of

Ekenäs (Tammisaari), a small town west of Helsinki, and Fagerholm herself writes that Ekenäs and the surrounding area “really *is* not the Flatnäs in this novel, but someone who has been here will surely recognize a little bit” (“det *är* ju inte den här romanens Flatnäs, men lite kan den som varit här säkert känna igen sig”) (Fagerholm 2012, 460). Some aspects of Flatnäs are so closely parallel with Ekenäs that the reader is convinced of its actual location, others so different that the reader is jolted out of the image of an Ekenäs they are familiar with. The reader experiences Flatnäs through its inhabitants and joins their creation of meaning in their making of place. However, it becomes a different Flatnäs, especially for those with Ekenäs at the back of their minds, since the reader’s Flatnäs is a conglomeration of the characters’ versions as well as the narrator’s. A partially transformed referent, when it is as identifiable as Ekenäs in *Lola uppochner*, has the reader teetering on the border between the real and the imagined place. A recognized or suspected referent reminds the reader that the fiction is indeed fiction, and some readers may even be yanked out of the fiction entirely when Flatnäs suddenly diverges from a familiar Ekenäs.

What, then, are we to make of Ekenäs, a perfectly nice and perfectly ordinary small town, as a referent? Or any of Fagerholm’s referents as geographical points? They certainly are not what Westphal might call overdetermined, and text and place are not completely conflated. The novels can influence the view of these places, as far as the reader recognizes them, but more importantly, the basic definition of place as a site which is meaningful to someone comes into play here: for a reader not familiar with, say, a particular suburb in eastern Helsinki, the referents are created as places through the text.

POTENTIAL SUBJECTIVITIES

In the beginning of this chapter I called Monika Fagerholm an author of place and space. The former refers to portrayals of geographical sites—whether they have equivalents in the world outside the novel or not—which acquire meaning both through the characters who experience them and through the experience of the reader. However, it is not necessarily a specific geographic location which carries meaning in the novels. Instead referents, when they exist, constitute one layer among many in the literary space Fagerholm builds. Fagerholm as an author of space in turn refers to different types of abstract spatiality, what Tuan described as expansion and movement made possible by place.

Literary scholar Maria Margareta Österholm calls the swimming pool a girl's room of their own for Sandra and Doris. She sees a trope of the girl's room in contemporary literature, where girls are both cloistered and free to create their own worlds with their own rules, and she calls the swimming pool "[Doris's and Sandra's] own world, a place where they play with femininity and make up stories based on their own experiences" (Österholm 2016, 104ff.). Building on this, my claim is that this "world of their own" is not only a turn of phrase but a mental spatiality at work in several of Monika Fagerholm's works: a swimming pool or a closet is transformed into a whole universe, a bedroom becomes an eternal utopia.

These are neither meaning-carrying places nor undifferentiated, uncharted space, but rather a combination of the two—space and place meet or even coincide. This mental spatiality opens up an exploration of norms and transgressions, of potential subjectivities: as Yi-Fu Tuan notes, "[c]ompared to space, place is a calm center of established values" (Tuan 2001, 54). Fagerholm explores the lives of women who look for a different life but are caught at the crossroads between fixity and future; the 13-year-old who charts new ways of being a girl in a new suburb, the girls who lose themselves in each other and the private universe they construct.

NOTES

1. All quotes from *Diva* and *Lola uppochmer* (2012) trans. HL, emphases in originals.
2. While borders based on nationality and language are problematic at best, historically Finland-Swedish literature has been written by Swedish-speaking Finns and has usually been published in Finland. For further information on Finland-Swedish literature and Fagerholm in a minority literature context as well as Fagerholm's influence, see Malmio and Österlund 2016, 9–11.
3. Prieto is paraphrasing Leman Stefanovic 2004.
4. I am aware of the anthropocentrism of this definition, but it is apt in this context. As a baseline, all the characters in Fagerholm's novels are human, even if some transformations take place in *Diva*. See for example, Kurikka 2016; Lahdenperä 2016.
5. For further discussion and definitions of space and/or place, see Prieto 2012; Westphal 2011; Cresswell 2004.
6. Published in the US under the title *Wonderful Women by the Sea* (The New Press, New York, 1998).
7. Merete Mazzarella (1999, 134–5) notes that the summer paradise in *Wonderful Women by the Water* does not quite conform to the cliché, as

- Bella and Kayus rent their house and have to renegotiate the lease every year, while the Angel family are arrivistes who have built their house. For the summer cottage as heterotopia in *Wonderful Women by the Water*, see Cosslett 2007. See also Ekman (1995, 214–8) on the trope of the summer cottage as a contrast to city life, and Ingström (2014b, 117–219) on Finland-Swedish summer cottages in general.
8. See also Lahdenperä and Malmio 2017, 158ff., 175ff.
 9. Place names are given in Swedish with the Finnish name in parenthesis.
 10. For more on Diva as a figure of resistance, see Lahdenperä 2016.
 11. See also Ingström 2000.
 12. For an analysis of Diva's foil Kari, her sister SannaMaria and their use of the theater storage closet, see Österholm 2009.
 13. See for example, pp. 426–7: "Jag tar mig in i kartrummet, jag lägger mig på mage på en av de allra äldsta kartorna. En karta över gamla Mesopotamien, den är stilig, min favorit. Gnider magen mot det sköra underlaget så att det söndras av min gnidning, gnider ännu hårdare, **lilla döden lilla döden** (...) i det här ögonblicket av **totalnjutning** vet jag något som jag inte kan förklara. **Det kommer att gå bra**. Det finns överhuvudtaget ingen möjlighet att det inte kommer att gå bra." ("I enter the map room, I lay down on my stomach on one of the very oldest maps. A map of Old Mesopotamia, it is grand, my favorite. Rub my stomach on the fragile material so that it breaks from my rubbing, rub even harder, **the little death the little death**. (...) in this moment of **total pleasure**, I know something I cannot explain. **It will be alright**. There is absolutely no way it will not be alright.") See also p. 362: "Kari är ett hus av glömska. Kari är ett hus av ord. Kari är en skrubb, **den dolda läroplanen**. Kari är det samlade bråtet som ska lämnas i en skrubb därifrån fjärligen ska flyga." ("Kari is a house of forgetfulness. Kari is a house of words. Kari is a closet, **the hidden curriculum**. Kari is the collected debris which will be left in a closet from which the butterfly will fly.")
 14. The mystery of the American girl refers to Eddie de Wire, a young American girl who came to stay with relatives in the area and drowned under mysterious circumstances. The mystery is explained in the following novel, *The Glitter Scene*.
 15. For more on *Lola uppochner* and genre, see Österlund 2016.

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